

# FIRST PRIZE

## The Boy Who Held up the Sky

*Crunch, crunch.* Tugging my backpack back on my shoulders while trying not to sink under the grass and mud, I silently cursed myself. *Why did I decide to wear heels again?* Standing on the top of a hill, I noticed a kid halfway down with both his arms extending upward, as if holding up an invisible barrier only he, himself, knew about.

“What’re you doing?” I asked, walking towards him while trying not to stumble in my heels.

“This is for my volunteer hours,” the boy answered without taking his eyes off the sky. “I was asked to hold up this area’s sky for a little bit.”

“. . . You’ve got to be kidding me.” He must be really gullible, or just plain stupid. But either way, I didn’t have the heart to tell him. There was determination like I’ve never seen before in his eyes.

And so the days continued, with me coming to this hill right after school every day, and him earning his “volunteer hours” by holding up the sky. He rarely moved or talked, even on those rainy days of April. I would watch him watching the sky, and be amazed by how fast time passed. Sometimes I even felt there was something his arms and hands were holding up against, something so powerful it could only be seen from heaven above.

One day as I was walking up the hill to see him again, I heard yelling and saw a bunch of high-school boys around him. They were making faces and taunting him; some were even pushing him around. One boy pinched his face and smirked. “What a freak, he doesn’t move or complain at all.”

“Ha, makes it easier for us!” another boy laughed.

By now I was running down the hill, seeing there was no time to waste. “What are you guys doing?” I shouted, “Get away from him!”

Suddenly someone swung a baseball bat against his back and he collapsed. But all he did that moment was yell out, “Get down!” at us.

I kneeled as fast as I could and covered both of my hands over my head. That second the world went completely black and I felt something heavy pressing on my back.

“It’s okay now, you can get up.”

I slowly opened my eyes and saw him standing in front of me. All around me was left undisturbed as if nothing had ever happened.

“By the way, I’ve finished my hours. See you around.” He smiled at me, and for the first time started walking down the hill, until I couldn’t see him anymore. The only evidence he was ever real were the unconscious boys lying on the ground.

**by Jia Hui Cao** (Grade Nine)  
St. Robert Catholic High School  
Thornhill, Ontario



# FIRST PRIZE

## The Thawing of a Heart

Glass crunches beneath his boots, shards fracturing and sticking to the bottoms of his soles.

*If my feet were bare, how bloody they would be,* he thinks to himself as he picks his way among the debris. He scours the area for gold, jewellery, copper menorahs—anything of value, anything that may have been left behind by the first wave of scouts.

*Nothing.*

He grunts in frustration. The second wave hardly ever brought back goods—so meticulous were their brothers in the first wave—and the rare few who did manage to find something worth taking usually kept it for themselves. Their iron *groszy* coins and copper-plated electric wires were too insignificant to even be missed.

Suddenly, just as he is about to give up and turn back, a glint of gold catches his eye. He stoops down to retrieve the fallen object, his fingers closing over something distinctly metallic. His lighter illuminates with a *click* and—

Disappointment crests over him like a wave when he realizes it is simply a picture frame, and not even a gold or silver one at that. Disgusted, he is about to toss it aside when the photograph trapped beneath the cracked glass catches his eye.

It is a family of five.

The photograph seems to have been taken at a formal photography parlour. A washed-out white sheet serves as backdrop, in front of which there sat two young girls on stools, the elder one cradling a tiny infant in her thin arms. They were dressed in matching dresses with high collars and a little sash at the waist. Behind the three children stood their parents, a white-haired Jew with a philosophical crease between his eyes, and his wife, a round-faced woman, extraordinarily plain.

The whole picture is quite plain, really—except for one thing. Unlike all the other photographs he's seen, which are posed and monotonous, this one seems oddly . . . *dynamic*. Lively. Spirited. Full of life. The infant bawled, the elder sister laughed, and the younger sister pouted as if maddened by the fact her baby sister was stealing all the attention. And the two parents—he, this supposedly cold-hearted warrior, is suddenly struck dumb by the intense look of sheer *love* in their eyes as they regarded the minor spectacle.

Unlike all the other photographs he's seen, it awakens a tingle in his chest he does not find welcome. He spares one last passing glance at the photograph before dropping it so shards fracture and stick to the bottoms of his soles.

For the merest of moments, he wonders how much of this destruction—the horrific fate of this once happy family—is his doing.

And then he leaves.

**by Jenny Hui** (Grade Ten)  
Prince of Wales Mini School  
Vancouver, British Columbia



# FIRST PRIZE

## We Will Run

I think one day I should like to be a pirate, which is ridiculous; I'm about as bad-ass as a turtle, except I don't even bite. I would like to steal and spit, sail and swear. I would like to feel the storm coming before the sky can change. I want sea-salted air and wind-ripped hair.

But I live in a time where being a sword-fighting pirate is not a legitimate career.

Last week in math class the girl sitting in front of me turned around, calling me by name. She asked how I liked our teacher last year compared to this one. I looked at her for a second before I replied. I didn't remember her face or her name and yet she knew me.

The next day she called me again. "Annie," she said, "work together?"

I nodded and slid beside her. I read her worksheet: "Sophia."

"When I was little," she whispered, "my sister and I lived in a neighbourhood full of boys, but there was no difference. We just ran."

I smiled then as I remembered my own neighbours and the way we would run.

"At night we would wait for the moon and then run some more. My sister and I can't do that here; it is too cold. But back home the sand would be so hot from a day in the sun heat would rise off it."

I suddenly felt it, as if the tile flooring in the white-walled classroom had turned to red blazing sand.

Sophia paused, then asked what I wanted to be when I was older.

I lied and told her I didn't know. When I returned the question she said she would study business until she married. Then she would be a wife.

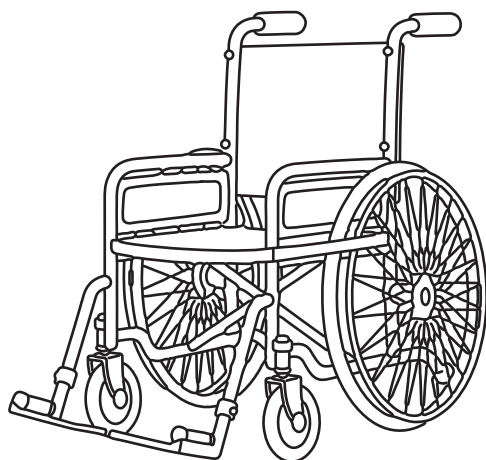
My head snapped. This time I looked—really looked at the girl who remembered me when I took no notice to her. I saw her face. And that was all. The rest of her was completely covered. I didn't know what to say.

After school I took the long bus ride away from the city to my grandparents' home. Gazing out the window I thought of the way the prairie cools once the sun goes down. The way Sophia's culture says women are only to be wives once they are married. The way she was okay with it. The way we were raised so differently, yet there was no difference between us.

One day I will be a pirate. I will discover answers rather than bury treasure. I will steal commas and spit out words, I will sail through paragraphs and I will swear. Because, hell, I want to be able to run in the moonlight.

*by Jessy Lee Saas* (Grade Eleven)  
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# FIRST PRIZE

## When Lifeless Drums Are Recycled

Mrs. Welkins died last night.

“Peacefully,” they told Sally. “In her sleep,” as if they measured their success by the tranquillity of a patient’s evaporation from the world. And like nothing changed, like her heart was whole, Sally continued her routine in the dining room at the home—five hours, twice a week—feeding, cleaning, and comforting the elderly, like newborn infants.

“Where’s my wallet?” Jean would ask absentmindedly, stroking her stuffed animal over and over until the nonexistent creases were smoothed out.

“Dinner’s free,” Sally would remind her. “Don’t worry about it.”

Bert would play with the seat belt of his wheelchair—clicking it in, clicking it out. “Tick, tock, tick, tock,” he would repeat. “Recycling truck is here.”

“Leave it in, Bert,” she would say in her soothing voice. “We wouldn’t want you to fall.”

The prehistoric screen of the television would be playing *The Young and the Restless*, tucked away in the corner of the dining room, and Sally would switch it back to tennis. They preferred tennis. All that was necessary was to watch the rhythm and keep the tempo. Back and forth, back and forth, the ball would dance. If only it were life, stretching as far as it could across the court before rebounding, retracing its steps, going back in time. If only.

And Mrs. Welkins would be facing the window, the third window on the left, gazing at her reflection and clutching the locket around her neck with urgency.

“What’s in the locket?” Sally would ask.

“Time.” Mrs. Welkins would continue to stare at her soul. “Memories. Stars I fished out of the sea. So many stars.”

Sally had never understood until too late how they all meant the same thing.

Once, the locket had fallen, released from Mrs. Welkins’s death grip onto the unforgiving linoleum floor. Cracked open, Sally had delicately picked up the locket to replace it around the old lady’s neck. And she had noticed it was empty. The contents had spilled around them, dandelion seeds blown away into the wind by the softest touch, to be buried and reused in the earth.

“Tick, tock, tick, tock.”

The following night, Mrs. Welkins was dead.

But Earth’s heart kept beating. And Jean continued to stroke her stuffed animal, Bert continued to buckle in his seat belt, and Sally continued to breathe in and out.

“Recycling truck is here.”

*by Kana Wiens* (Grade Twelve)  
Dr. Charles Best Secondary School  
Coquitlam, British Columbia



# SECOND PRIZE

## Shadows within Shadows

Isoroku snapped awake. He hardly dared breathe. He sensed a presence. The boy searched for signs of movement in the moonlit room, but saw only shadows within shadows. Isoroku listened intently for indication of an intruder, but heard nothing unusual.

The cherry blossoms in the garden rustled like silk as a light breeze passed through. Water trickled from the small fountain into the fishpond, and nearby a cricket made its persistent nightly chirp. The rest of the house lay silent. Perhaps he was overreacting, a bad *kami* spirit disturbing his dream.

This past month the Yamamoto household had been on edge with the rumour of rebellion, and Isoroku's father had been called into service to help quell potential uprisings. No wonder Isoroku felt jumpy. He lowered himself onto his futon and, as he did so, the cricket chirped a little too loudly. He recalled, "*A samurai should always obey his instincts.*" His instincts told him something was wrong.

He rose from bed, eyes strained. Suddenly, a silver star spun out of the darkness. Isoroku threw himself out of the way a second too late. The *shuriken* sliced his cheek before burying itself deep into the pillow where his head had just lain. A rush of hot blood streamed down his face. In one fluid movement, he sprang to his feet, sword ready. The black figure drifting from the shadows was unmistakable: a ninja, assassin of the night.

With measured slowness, the ninja unsheathed a *tanto* blade, short and straight for stabbing. The ninja took a silent step closer and raised the *tanto*, a human cobra preparing to strike. Anticipating the attack, Isoroku sliced at the approaching assassin with his large curved *katana* sword. The ninja evaded, spun, and kicked him squarely in the chest. Thrown backwards, Isoroku crashed through the paper-thin *shoji* door of his room and landed heavily on his back. The ninja leapt through the opening, landing cat-like in front of him. Panicked, he tried to scream for help, but his throat had swollen shut. He realized the ninja's *shuriken* had been dipped in poison, paralyzing him limb by limb.

Now blind, Isoroku listened for the ninja's approach, but heard only the *chirp-chirp* of the cricket. He recalled hearing how ninjas used insect calls to mask their movements. That was how his assassin had slipped by the guards undetected! Briefly his eyesight returned; a shrouded face floated above him. Through the slit in the hood of its *shinobi shozoko*, the boy could see emerald-green eyes blazing with hatred. "This is a message for your father," hissed the ninja. Isoroku felt the *tanto* pierce the flesh above his heart and his whole body flared white-hot with pain. . . .

by **Harry Huang** (Grade Nine)  
St. George's School  
Vancouver, British Columbia



# SECOND PRIZE

## The Coffee Shop

As my breath disappears into the glass of the frosted windows, the wintry morning unravels itself through a clear opening. Icicles as sharp as swords spring from the roof of the coffee shop in the crisp air. Flurries of snow dissipate and descend from the grey sky, twirling and swirling like ballerinas in gusts of wind. And the snow, the infinite blanket of snow, shimmers in iridescence.

Under the amber lights, employees scatter behind the counter to prepare for the day. Paper cups are stacked in pyramids. Beans are roasted and poured into jars. Bottles clink in the cooler with their tropical juices swishing within the glass. Fresh pastries with breathing crusts rest in baskets. Blenders roar through the jazz lullabies pulsing through the speakers. In the middle of it all are empty chairs and tables, as still as marble statues.

Shuddering in the corner, I reach for my latte sitting on the table beside a photograph of my mother and myself. A warm sensation rushes through me, replacing the chills crawling down my spine. The bittersweet aroma rushes into the air as disorganized steam, melting into my face in rippling waves. Gradually, the soft blues' melodies and the noises from the counter combine into a drone. The cup and photograph sink into the walls. Little by little, the world pulls away from me through a tunnel until it falls out of my grasp and vanishes into darkness.

A tinkle of wind chimes suddenly rings in my ears. My eyes flash open to the sight of a woman entering the store's revolving doors with a little girl. They order their drinks at the counter and then make their way to the table in front of me. The child plops into her seat with a stuffed toy. The mother smiles and asks her a question that launches an ardent conversation to burst through the quietude.

A moment later a waitress arrives with two cups of hot chocolate. The girl's eyes twinkle in delight at the beverages in front of her. The parent gently takes her daughter's hands, burying them in her own. "Your hands are freezing, dear," she says, pushing one cup towards her. Keeping one hand in her guardian's, the child reaches for her drink with the other.

Reminded of my own beverage, I curl my fingers around the handle of my latte and pull it towards me. It catches on the glossy image of my mother. Carefully, I push the photograph away and, resting my hands back on the mug, wait for the familiar surge of warmth from earlier to billow into me.

But it never comes. For my coffee has already gone cold.

*by Tiffany Huang* (Grade Ten)  
Hugh McRoberts Secondary School  
Richmond, British Columbia



# SECOND PRIZE

## Crying Stars

I'm cold. Every breath feels colder, like ice building up deep inside this broken heart.

I walk down the long, lonely road where she died, shrouded in a blinding mist. Bordered by the sweet, serene sight of the rocks of the British Columbian coast to the west that keep receiving their gentle kisses from the rough Pacific Ocean, and the great, beautiful, Canadian rainbow forest to the east. She used to love this view. I'd like to think she's up there, somewhere on that thing—that object orbiting this Earth.

When it first arrived, some people were afraid, others filled with hope. But no matter where you were, every church was filled.

People are getting mugged, stores robbed, right in the streets while I walk. I'm not afraid to die; you can't kill a ghost anyway. All of these people, these scared and frightened people, mugging and robbing, directing all of their anger as if it even really makes a difference if that thing is here to end us all.

NASA said the lights from the object resemble the patterns of Earth. People have tried contacting it. One man said he saw his dead wife; no one believed him, but I want to. Another woman claimed to have seen her mother who died when she was young.

I can't keep coming back to this place anymore. A ghost, among a bright sea of beating hearts. And if you're warm, then you can't relate to me. I'd just give anything to see her again. Perhaps there is some form of catharsis in it all. I hope there is. Maybe my mother was right: "The path to happiness is riddled with glass."

A chance meeting, one lonely soul enters a cleaned out store. Fate, two lonely souls wander into the same store. One of them comes as the clerk enters, robs him, holds the other soul at gunpoint, demands he help her escape. It's done. He promises it isn't the last time they'll see each other. And now he doesn't know . . . is he alive or dead? Is life getting colder or warmer? It seems to confuse, memories of togetherness, love . . . replaced with another face.

A cold heart, a wandering mind—is that the reality in which I live? Or have I managed to fabricate an inescapable fictional world?

I look to the sky. I see a bright blazing sun pushing aside the clouds and stretching its fingers across the vast, blue Pacific Ocean, an ocean of pain and memories. I see nothing but a mirror image of my own world, orbiting the glass on which I stand.

But when I look at the glass . . . where is my reflection?

*by Jarod Sherrington* (Grade Eleven)  
Confederation Secondary School  
Val Caron, Ontario





# SECOND PRIZE

## Last April

A long time ago there had been a train crash. Not recently. A while back. *A long time ago.*

This was the answer Claudia got whenever she asked about the journey she had to make to the base camp. Everyone had reduced the exact date of the crash to “a long time ago.”

Finally Claudia took the matter to the oldest person in town: Gertrude Peterson, an eighty-nine-year-old woman who had most certainly been alive *a long time ago.*

“April,” Gertrude said wisely.

“How many years ago?”

“Not years. Three months.”

“But. . .” Claudia frowned, wondering if the old lady had a mental illness. “Everyone told me the last crash was a really long time ago.”

Gertrude sipped her tea serenely and shifted under her quilt in the old wicker chair on her porch. “Yes, and that’s a long time to them,” Gertrude said. “But I’ve lived here since I was nineteen, and there have been, oh, fifty or so train crashes in that time, I’d say. Well, ones I can remember.”

“Wait. Ones you can remember?”

“People forget them, see. But if you’re like me, if you live here long enough—and not many people do—you start to remember. He can’t control you.” Gertrude smiled.

“Who?” Claudia was getting nervous. She really didn’t like the sound of this, and was starting to worry about Gertrude.

“That boy, my dear. Have you not seen him prowling the streets? Eyeing every man, woman, and child! Have you not felt the wind as he walks past? Seventy years I’ve lived here, and he’s never a day older than twenty! He changes the train rails, see. Then he changes the memories.” For the first time, Gertrude looked deeply unnerved. She set her teacup down shakily.

*Flippin’ fantastic*, Claudia thought. *Isn’t there anyone useful in this town?* “There’s a boy who’s making trains crash and then wiping people’s minds?” Claudia asked skeptically.

“That’s what I’ve—” Gertrude stopped. Her eyes bugged out, and her brown face turned a sickly grey shade. She stared over Claudia’s shoulder.

“What?”

“Don’t turn too quickly.”

Slowly, Claudia looked around to the street. A blond boy about her age was walking past in ragged jeans and a hoodie. Claudia *had* actually seen him around town. He looked pretty normal. But for a split second when he glanced up at them, Claudia could have sworn she did feel a cool breeze.

Once he was gone, Gertrude spoke. “He walks past four times a day,” she whispered. “Every day, four times. Never stopping. Just looking.” Gertrude’s breaths were shallow and uneven. “He’s coming for me one day. I know he is.”

“Why? What did you do?”

“I survived.”

*by Anna Grunsky* (Grade Twelve)  
Nepean High School  
Ottawa, Ontario



# THIRD PRIZE

## Replicates

I hated school so early in the morning;  
I made my clone so I could be snoring.  
Then replication went out of control,  
I was left to take the toll.  
Soon they forced me to rebel,  
And in ashes my old school fell.  
Such a miracle and disaster,  
I am no longer their master.

“I didn’t do it!” I sassed while gazing around the office.

“You’re a wreck, Eli. Such a student you used to be. But now your record shows thirty absences and a suspension this year,” Principal Pete tested.

Apparently I had pillaged the school and burned half of it down. Designed flawless, I would never do such a thing. But perhaps the original would. I had to tell him I hadn’t done it, but the principal would never believe just because I said so. Meticulously I said, “You just have to trust me on this.”

“I saw your face with my own two eyes! Why would I believe you?” Pete questioned.

“With the smoke and ruckus going on, it would be burdensome to identify a face in the chaos,” I replied anticipating the remark. “Perhaps a trickery of light is all.”

Pete scratched his head, grasping the idea. “No, I’m certain I saw you!” he barked when no hold was established.

I sighed in displeasure, but an ace up my sleeve kept me content. With a vocabulary matching a lexicographer I proclaimed, “For the duration of the emergency I was in math class situated on the distant side of the department. Ms. Rowl can assure you of that. Thus I could not be near the origin of the fire when she marked me present on the emergency attendance list.” I was well aware the principal knew Ms. Rowl had the eyesight of a hawk. And if she said I was in her class during the fire, then my claim must be genuine. The only logical way to confirm this was to ask Ms. Rowl herself.

“All right,” Pete concluded. “I will give her a call.”

I watched as Pete followed my plan exactly. Doing everything my careful words implied, only asking the questions I wanted to answer. He called, and to no surprise she stated I had indeed been present. Embarrassed of his false accusation he had no choice but to let me go. “You’re lucky this time, Eli. You are excused,” Pete hissed.

As I stood from the chair I felt a vibration in my pocket. “How did it go?” the voice cracked from my Nokia.

“It went as planned. Eli is no longer needed. You know what to do. Marvellous job, Clone Three,” Clone Two whispered as he left the office.

*by Andrew Yong Ton* (Grade Nine)  
H.J. Cambie Secondary School  
Richmond, British Columbia



# THIRD PRIZE

## The Piano

The piano in front of which I was sitting was in impeccable condition. The keys, yellow with age yet working perfectly, were waiting impatiently for me to start a melody. The problem: I wasn't ready.

When I was a young girl, my parents would take me to visit my grandparents in the countryside. My grandma, a plump woman with rosy cheeks, was stubborn yet lovely, and always baked rhubarb pies. My grandpa wore a kind countenance and played the fiercest game of chess I've ever encountered. When I was old enough, my grandma reminisced of how she was attacked in the streets. She warned me to look out for myself, and to decrease my faith in humanity . . . by just a little. I refused.

"Play," his voice, thunderous and demanding, terrorized the air in the old, abandoned theatre in which we were located. I could picture little children viewing this infrastructure as the house of amusement. Ironically, as most things are in life, it would now be the place of my demise. "Play!"

I knew how to work it, even though it had been five years since I last sat in front of the instrument. That's the funny thing—you start remembering notes and clefs when you have a gun pointed to the back of your head. The piece in front of me was one I've never confronted. My fingers anxiously found the first notes, and with my mind frantically processing everything, I began to play.

It was messy; a perfect representation of the frightened state in which I was in. The piano was superb; it was I who was awry. For every three correct notes, I played eight incorrectly. The piece, originally supposed to reflect exuberance, sounded sad and tortured.

"No, not like that!" he yelled, waving his gun menacingly through the air. "That's not the way she played it—that's not like Ophelia!"

I started to sob silently, while I faultily played. The tears were streaming in rhythm with the song. The music waivered throughout the space, reminding me of a wounded animal. The howl bounced off of the walls, and grew ever stronger and aggressive. This was not the melancholy song the composer intended it to be.

I heard a gunshot and saw a beam falling onto the stage. "Do you think I'm not going to shoot?" my captor angrily screamed. "Play the song the way she did!"

I thought of my grandma and my tears started coming in abundance. Incorrect notes followed more incorrect notes. If only I could be back there, playing chess with my grandpa, eating rhubarb pies, and still believing in people's integrity.

*by Michelle Krasovitski* (Grade Ten)  
Vaughan Secondary School  
Thornhill, Ontario



# THIRD PRIZE

## Tell Grandma I Say Hi

*Beep. Beep. Beep. . . .* The unceasing sound fills the boy's ears. It irritates him to no end, but he has learned to cherish it, for it is the only sign he is still alive.

Suddenly, his little sister comes barreling into the room.

"Be careful," he struggles to say as she tries to clamber onto him. She freezes immediately, lowering herself to the ground, backing away haltingly. He sees the look of uneasiness spread over her oval face as she takes notice of the wires affixed to him. Her blue eyes lose their signature glimmer and her cheeks lose their familiar pink hue. His teeth gnaw his lower lip as she retreats slowly, away from him.

"What are they doing to you?" she questions.

His teeth break the surface of his skin and his mouth fills with the metallic taste of blood. The truth is, no one is doing anything to him. It is in fact his own body earning him the luxury of residing in this hospital bed. But he can't bring himself to speak these words to his sister. The silence in the room is now deafening, yet the boy is still afraid to speak. He is afraid his own voice will cause him to shatter.

"Why did Mommy tell me it's time to say goodbye?" his sister's voice shakes, her eyes look everywhere but at him. Never has he felt so terrible over something he cannot control. "Why did she say you're leaving and never coming back?"

"Because," the boy says, finally testing his voice. He is startled when the little girl flinches. "Because I'm going to see Grandma," the boy says, hoping it is enough for her four-year-old brain to understand. Holding in the tears begging so desperately to fall, he watches his sister for a moment as the realization sets in.

He frees his hand of the blanket and beckons for his sister to come closer. She does and he takes her hand in his. It feels like a furnace on his frigid skin. "I love you. Don't ever forget that," he croaks as his body begins to feel heavy. His skin feels frozen now and his eyelids feel like lead. His once quick-beating heart now feels like it is being crushed by a pair of unforgiving hands. The boy will remember it this way forever, his last memory.

"I love you too," his sister whispers as his hand goes limp and his eyelids slide shut. She parts her lips to say one last thing, "Tell Grandma I say hi." And then she lets him go.

*by Brooklyn Dagenais* (Grade Eleven)  
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# THIRD PRIZE

## Three Days and Four Hours

It had been three days and four hours—three days and four hours since anyone had pulled into the driveway. The salt had kept it clear before, but had been washed to the bottom with yesterday’s rain and it was slick with ice in the early morning sun. It was eight in the morning and the sun had long since come up over the edges of the trees, but the Christmas lights still shone on the eaves, as they had since the house had been so hastily abandoned.

Evelyn stood at the bottom of the pathway staring up at them, eyes glazed over as she clutched her jacket closer to her body. It was too cold to be standing out here this early in the morning. Her breath was a white haze in front of her face, but she could not bring herself to move, even as the chill invaded her bones.

She felt sick, like her stomach had migrated from her midsection to her throat and was hovering there, on the verge of forcing her scant breakfast back up. Her mind was at war, conflicting sides in battle over whether she should dare to continue forwards. *How have I avoided coming back here for so long? Why am I back here so soon?*

Truthfully, Evelyn hadn’t thought she’d have the guts to step out of the car when she got here. Pulling in a shaky breath she took the first step up the pathway, heart hammering in her hands as they clenched in her jacket. *It is irrational to fear this so much; it isn’t like I am going to walk in the front doors and find—*

Evelyn wasn’t really sure what she was expecting when she stepped inside, but it wasn’t the scene greeting her.

Everything seemed so achingly normal. Carelessly discarded shoes littered the front entry and the coat stand still overflowed. Her boots echoed loudly off the hardwood floors and she felt cold even in the warmth of the baseboard heaters. The hallway seemed longer than it was, stretching on and on. Evelyn’s heart was heavy in her chest as she stopped at the end, and stared at the line where the hardwood turned into tile.

There was an open box of cereal on the counter, the bottom soggy with spilled milk. The milk jug lay on its side at the edge of the counter, the contents spilled across the kitchen. It had been knocked over during the commotion, the sole reminder anything had happened at all.

It had been three days and four hours—three days and four hours since she had walked into this kitchen and found her mother’s dead body on the floor.

*by Sarah Van Es* (Grade Twelve)  
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